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ABSTRACT

This first paper in the intrapersonal skills series presents a conceptual model of intrapersonal skills. Intrapersonal skills are defined as those skills individuals need to possess and perfect in order to manage themselves, and as a prerequisite to interpersonal skills. It is noted that intrapersonal skills are concerned with lessening internal conflict; understanding how one handles perceived external experience internally; and coming to terms with one's qualities, limitations, and potential. The conceptual model presented here views people as systems with inputs, processes, outputs, and, as open systems, with a feedback loop between output and input. Two systems models, a simple, closed physiological model and a more complicated, open psychological one, are illustrated and discussed. The psychological system is then expanded to include needs, decisions, and goals in the model. The effects of natural limitations, value added limitations, and cost/rewards analysis on the model are considered. A flow chart of intrapersonal conflict is provided and five defense mechanism responses to conflict are discussed: (1) reaction formation; (2) displacement; (3) projection; (4) introjection; and (5) rationalization. (NRB)

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INTRA-PERSONAL SKILLS SERIES

1. Intra-personal Skills: A Conceptual Model

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INTRA-PERSONAL SKILLS: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

INTRODUCTION

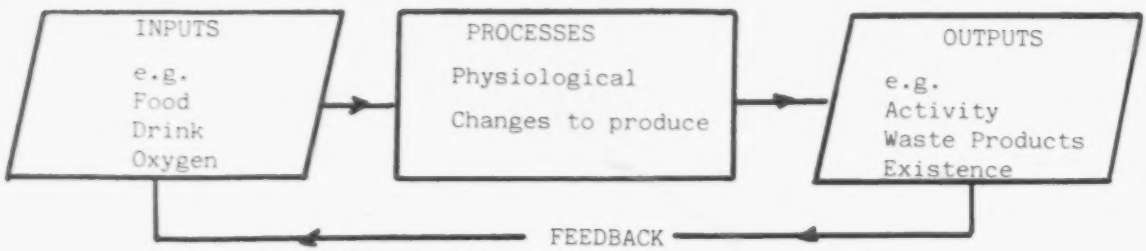
1. Intra-personal skills are those skills we require to possess and perfect in order to manage ourselves. It is a basic assumption in developing inter-personal skills, the managing of our interactions with others, that before we can learn to manage more effectively the world "out there", we have to understand more clearly, and be more skilled in managing, the world "inside here". Intra-personal skills are thus concerned with lessening internal conflict (developing a greater congruence between the ideal self and the perceived self), understanding the ways in which we handle perceived external experience internally, (our personal, core psychological processes which make us unique), and coming to terms with our qualities, limitations, and potential. Developing such skills leads to greater personal growth, autonomy, fulfilment, and, more importantly, wider options about how we respond to what we perceive in the external world. Enhanced self awareness allows us to use the self more productively.

2. A conceptual model, or map, will help us develop ways of thinking about ourselves which are more systematic than the random feedback we obtain from social interactions (which we distort as it passes through our core psychological processes), and enable us to develop more effective skills by informing us (using an analogy) of the basic and universal steps in internal processes.

SYSTEMS MODEL

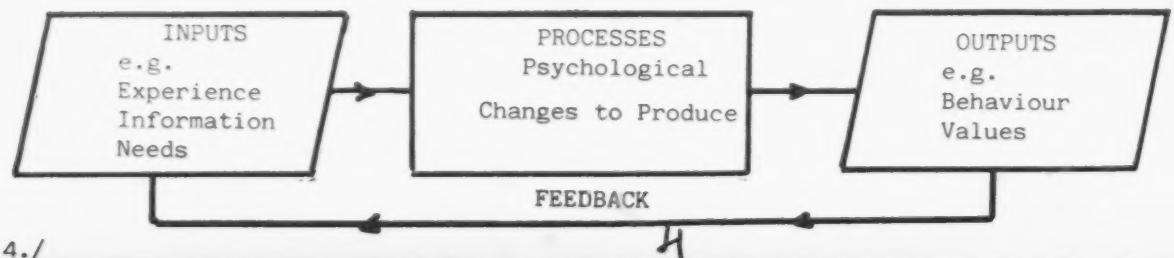
3. We can think of ourselves as a system, with Inputs, Processes or Throughputs, and Outputs, and, as open systems, with a Feedback Loop between Output and Input. However, human beings are complex. At one level of existence the system is a simple, closed organism:

System 1

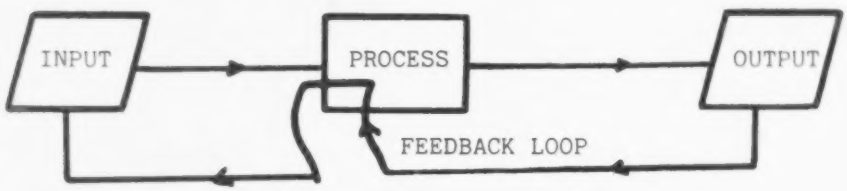


At another level of existence there is a second system with a psychological, as opposed to physiological, process "box":

System 2:

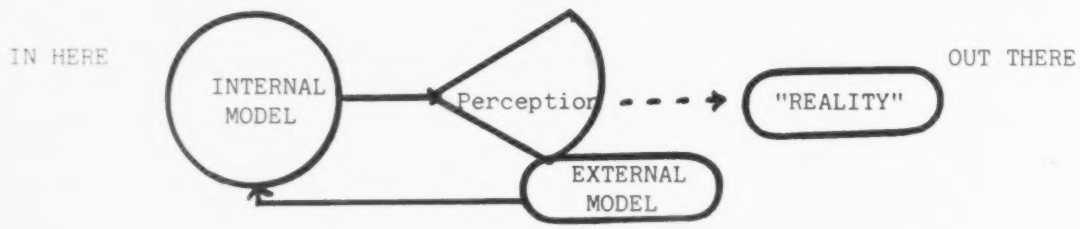


4. While System 1 is generally automatic, a complex series of sub-systems which go to make up our whole physiological structure, and in which little is under immediate and direct control, System 2, unless we are more aware, is in danger of becoming a closed system also. The more closed System 2 becomes, the less autonomous we become as human beings. System 2 has a less reliable feedback loop then System 1. For example, in order to obtain feedback about the effectiveness of our output say, "behaviour", we can ask others to tell us what they see. We may agree to modify the output as a result of the experience of the feedback. Generally, since we will not agree with, or accept, some part of the feedback (since the information does not tally with our self image or cuts across a belief we may have), that feedback is distorted. It is in fact filtered through our "process" box:



5. We may also observe ourselves and provide our own feedback: if,however, we already have a low self image we will tend to gather information which reinforces our already formed perceptions. In neither case is the feedback "objective" (the other sees what he or she wants to see anyway) and of less use to us if we are not highly self aware. It becomes important, therefore, that we have a clearer view of what happens in the box marked "process".

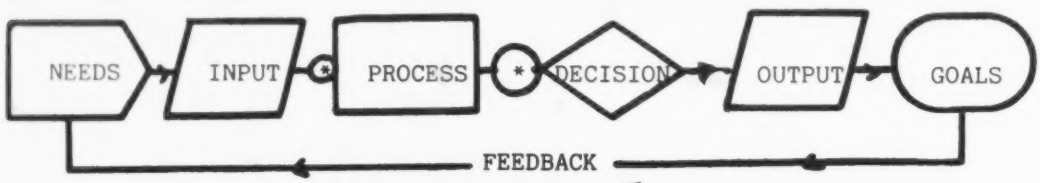
6. In using the analogy of a systems model we must also remember that our system is interacting with other systems, so that we have another map of the system "in here" and the world "out there".



Our individual processes will create for each of us an external model of "reality" ("out there"). They are a "value added" process, which is a product of us as entities, and a "natural limitations" filtering process.

The Core Psychological Process

7. System 2 can be expanded to illustrate the general working of the process box. If we add a "decision" box, the result of processing an input received from the environment, we have a map:



Between the input-process and process-decision are two "gates" which perform three functions, all limiting:

(a) Natural Limitations: our intelligence, our speed of handling information, and our capacity for ambiguity are inherited, physical limitations.

(b) Value Added Limitations: these are values that we ourselves derive from experience, the belief systems which we have created for ourselves, (from our perceptions of the environment), and values which have been scripted into us.

(c) Cost/Rewards Analysis: we continuously evaluate, make a prognosis of, likely outcomes of each of the options open to us in achieving goals.

8. Since we can do little about those natural limitations of intelligence and information handling (although we can compensate for them in other skills) it is central to the concept of intra-personal skills that we are able to manage more effectively our value added limitations.

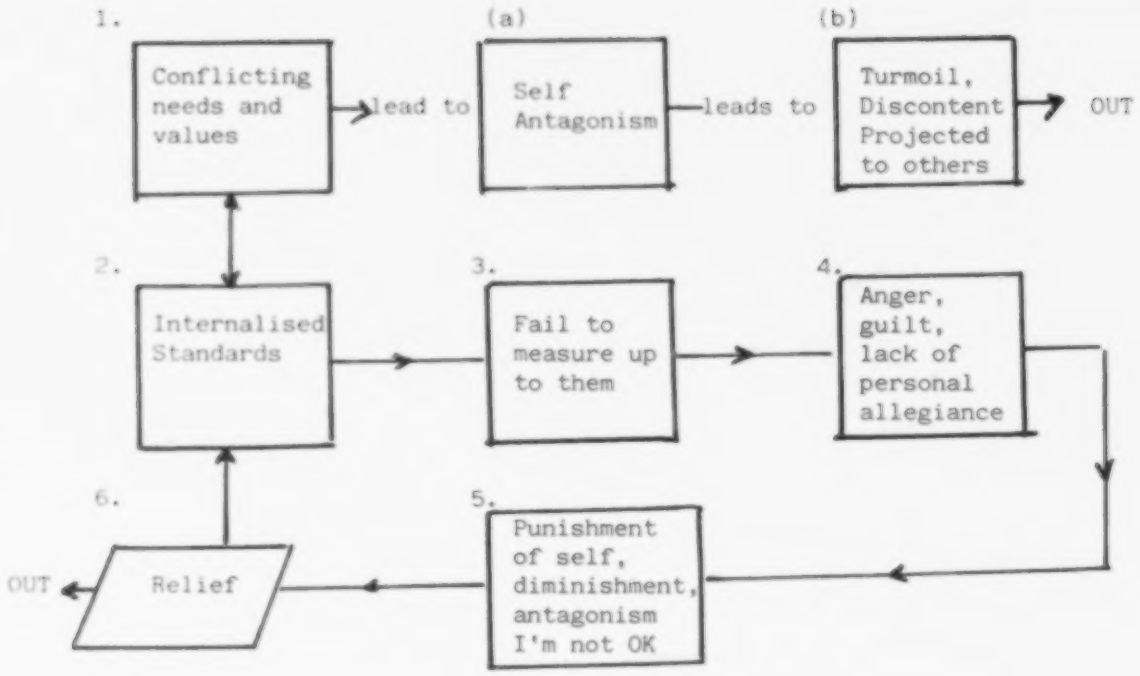
9. Each one of us has worked out ways of understanding the way things work out there. At our early stages of development, powerful figures shaped responses which would work (our Scripts) and we worked out for ourselves strategies for coping with less pain the environment. Script analysis, for example, will help us abandon those scripts which once worked for us but which may not be appropriate at our present age and stage. It may also help us to rewrite them so that they are helpful rather than dysfunctional.

10. The core process determines our working out of what goes on out there. First, there is the descriptive process which asks questions such as Why? How? What? Secondly, there is the prescriptive process which states what ought to be, should be, or must be. Both these processes may be rational or irrational; which, we have to work out. Both are filters; they act as processors of the information we receive and shape our outputs, or behaviour responses to the environment which make life easier, or, more difficult. Our values, attitudes, and commitments, which we learn from experience as we operate in an environment according to our social, cultural, ethnic or religious affiliations. Some of the processes are innate; we have certain predispositions to think one way rather than another. For example, we might be dominated by the left side of the brain or the right. We may alo be predisposed to being introverted as opposed to extroverted.

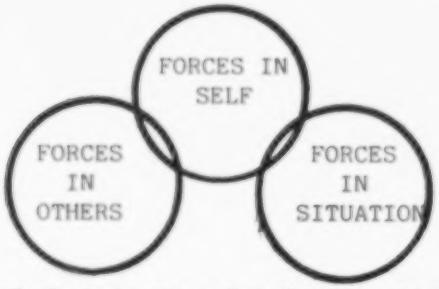
11. There are two major levels of human being: consciousness and self awareness. As self aware human beings we are faced with various fields of knowledge about inner experiences (how do I feel?) and outer experiences. There is an inner "I" and an outer "I" (as there is also an outer "you" and an inner "you", invisible, and visible). Since behaviour universally has three drivers - a cause, a motive, and a goal, so with no self awareness we act mechanically. We can only understand the other thus in the extent to which we can understand ourself. The ability to understand the self is directly related to the degree of intra-personal conflict we may feel.

12. To understand such intra-personal conflict we can again use an analogy, or map, using a flow chart of the sources of conflict.

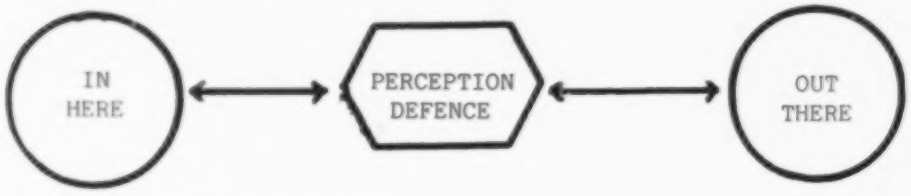
1./



13. Intra-personal conflict can be one of the most powerful forces within us as an individual. It is an assumption underlying development of inter-personal leadership and management skills that the situation which exists at any time is a dynamic interaction amongst three forces:



14. People have a number of choices when faced with situations: fight, or flight; assertion, or passivity; distress, or coping. In any case, one or more psychological defence mechanisms will be triggered:



There are five principal mechanisms:

(a)/

(a) Reaction formation: an attempt to camouflage something we consider a blemish by compensating, or over-compensating,

(b) Displacement: by scapegoating we make indirect expressions of things our Critical Parent forbids, or, we disguise unpleasant realities,

(c) Projection: those things which belong to us we attribute to others,

(d) Introjection: those good bits we see in others we attribute to ourselves, and,

(e) Rationalisation: we find a reason which justifies our action.

All these mechanisms keep our psychological pieces intact by some form of self deception. "Awareness" is knowing when we are being defensive, how, and why: we then have an opportunity to accept it (and live with the consequences) or change.

15. It is probably, however, our carefully constructed belief systems which influence how we process the perceived environment more than any other of our internal processes. There are a number of relatively simple ways in which we can create a sense of personal power, come to terms with the self, and remove conflicts by taking responsibility,analysing, choosing, and meeting one's own challenges, becoming aware of limitations, and taking action.

16. The skills needed to develop intra-personal management are described in separate Papers.

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